

## Promising Practice: Academic Advisor/Student Retention Specialist Model Edmonds Community College Creating Access to Careers in Healthcare (CATCH)

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Creating Access to Careers in Healthcare (CATCH) is Edmonds Community College's Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. A key element of this program's wraparound support team is its academic advisor/student retention specialist position. This is a relationship-based, student-centered model in which a student shares in the responsibility of advising and makes his or her own decisions to chart a path for personal growth. The professional student support relationship bridges faculty academic advising, classroom support, and the student's vision of personal development and life goals.

The CATCH program's wraparound support includes intensive interventions to respond to the many barriers that its students face. The program's navigators respond to social and financial barriers with ready referrals and follow-up with its community partners for events such as loss of home, unexpected changes in income, or family relationship problems. CATCH college success, computer literacy, and employment soft-skill instructors work with the allied health instructors to build new skills and identify tutoring or other interventions that may be needed. Along with the academic advisor, this team communicates through a Google Docs spreadsheet and weekly meetings to provide an early alert network tracking student progress.

One critical barrier for many students is their inability to see themselves being successful in life. The CATCH healthcare foundation core curriculum, with its stackable certificates and career pathway approach, provides a roadmap of clear individual steps to achieve a living wage and a future career. But self-sufficiency requires more than a clear path. Histories of past abuse or failures, along with negative social attitudes, are difficult to overcome. Students often have personal developmental barriers that may show up as "giving up," family discouragement, or even self-defeating intentional failure.

The developmental academic advising model CATCH employs uses the academic advisor/student retention specialist in a teaching function that is concerned not only with facilitating course or vocational decisions but also with encouraging students' development of rational processes, behavioral awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills. The goal is to assist students to develop and recognize their growing competence, autonomy, and purpose. Developmental advising is a process that is continuous and cumulative in building a relationship with the student. It requires establishment of caring, trusting interactions with the advisor.

Nora Faram, MSW, MHP, LSWAIC, is the academic advisor/student retention specialist for CATCH. She has provided some examples of how she works with students in this role.

About the time a CATCH student cohort completes the initial college success skill course, Nora meets with each student in an introductory interview to begin the student engagement plan that outlines that student's goals and dreams for their future. She uses this time to start building the relationship and trust and assesses the student's skill level in critical thinking and decision making. With continued conversation, and in using crisis assistance and referrals, she teaches problem solving. Nora is often the first confidante of a student in trouble.

One student with excellent grades declared she wanted to quit the program. Being a recent immigrant, she was greatly stressed over several factors in her household. She, her husband, and her infant daughter had several other family members staying in their house, and, with her husband's \$10/hour job being the only income, she felt tremendous financial stress. On top of this worry, noise, and distraction, she found the cultural changes in adapting to American society created additional conflicts in expectations and family roles. She said that at times she felt split between two worlds. Along with other supports, Nora helped her explore her thinking, reflecting on her strengths and the benefits of staying with the program. The student decided to keep going and completed the program. During a CATCH recognition event this student received a special perseverance award that was presented by the college president. As her patient care skills increased so did her outlook. She earned her Nursing Assistant license and Phlebotomy Technician certificate, qualifying to sit for the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) phlebotomy exam. She was hired by her phlebotomy externship site and continued her education, earning her Clinical Lab Assistant certificate with a goal of a Bachelor's degree in Medical Technology. She is now in a lead role in her lab and makes about \$18/hour.

Nora also helps to arrange recognition events that are specific and timely to help students see the success of others and celebrate their own successes. As students in one recent cohort neared the end of their first college success course, the instructor talked with Nora about their success. Of 19 students in the cohort, 15 had perfect attendance, and all had activated their campus email the first week and made fast progress in their computer literacy lessons. Awards for perfect attendance and a simple celebration were part of the last day of class. The students were surprised, excited, and proud of themselves. One student commented, "Let's keep this up and continue the good work."